BEST COPY AVAILABLE

he White Brick. $1000 Prize Story!

Office of the
DEC 22 1899
Register of Copyrights
2nd Copy Delivered to the
DEC 23 1899
Periodicals Department

The Black Cat

The White Brick.
$1,000 Prize Story.
F. E. Chase.

The Rouen Doctor.
Mary Eastwood Knevels.

Back to Nature.
Henry Wallace Phillips.

Poker Jim's Mahala.
Miriam Michelson.

A Humble Abolitionist.
Will N. Harben.

5 CENTS

No. 52. Copyright, 1899, by the Shortstory Publishing Co.

SHORTSTORY PUBLISHING CO 144 HIGH ST BOSTON, MASS

Pettijohn's Breakfast Food

ALL THE WHEAT BUT THE OVERCOAT

ALWAYS FOUND AT THE TOP.

Pettijohn's Breakfast food is a clean, healthful product, containing all the nourishing constituents that are found in whole wheat grains, especially the proteins and the phosphorus and iron compounds, so necessary to the maintenance of healtl

Besides being an easily and quickly prepared breakfast dish, delicate, appetiz ng and nourishing, Pettijohn's Breakfast Food makes unequalled **Griddle Cakes, Gems,** Muffins and **Puddings.** Also an excellent thickening for **Soups.** Cold Pettijohn's Po ridge is delicious when fried like corn meal mush. Write for our Cereal Cook Book, e ited by *Mrs. Rorer.* It tells all about cooking all kinds of cereals all sorts of ways. Free, postpaid.

THE AMERICAN CEREAL CO., Monadnock Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

Copyright, 1899, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

No. 52. JANUARY, 1900. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

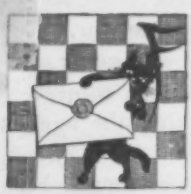
Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

THE BLACK CAT is devoted exclusively to original, unusual, fascinating stories — every number is complete in itself. It publishes no serials, translations, borrowings, or stealings. It pays nothing for the name or reputation of a writer, but the highest price on record for *Stories that are Stories*, and it pays not according to length, but according to strength. To receive attention, manuscripts must be sent unrolled, fully prepaid, and accompanied by addressed and stamped envelope for return. All MSS. are received and returned at their writers' risk.

CAUTION. — *The entire contents of* THE BLACK CAT *are protected by copyright, and publishers everywhere are cautioned against reproducing any of the stories, either wholly or in part.*

The White Brick.*

BY F. E. CHASE.



IGG Street was one of those thoroughfares, so common in American cities, whose houses, all precisely alike, are ranged with military precision as if marshaled in battle array by their speculative builders against the army of wage earners for whose occupancy they were designed. Organization and discipline were strongly suggested by the uniform ranks of octagon-fronts, each capped with its formal mansard roof, and accoutred with its high flight of stone steps, and the effect of this suggestion was promptly confessed by their intimidated tenants, who paid an excessive rent with apprehensive alacrity. There were some in the neighborhood who, under a not uncommon stress of pecuniary circumstances, might have defied a solitary landlord in single combat, but to challenge the might of the brigaded proprietor whose capital had brought the street into being was beyond their courage. So the monthly tribute exacted by this besieging force of bricks and mortar was promptly yielded, and thus it came about that tenants stayed on in Figg Street, and

* This is one of two stories that took the second prize of $1,000 in THE BLACK CAT competition ending March 31, 1899.

Copyright, 1899, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

were penetrated with a strong sense of fellowship which quickly engendered a friendly intimacy.

I, like all of my neighbors, had moved in when the place was first built, lured by the odor of fresh paint and damp plaster, which is always so inscrutably attractive to the habitual rent-payer. Rumors of open plumbing and porcelain tubs had robbed the adjacent avenues of their choicest tenants, and in an incredibly short time after its establishment Figg Street had become fully populated, with the exception of one tenement. Number Seventeen, eight doors below the house I occupied, and upon the same side, was not immediately taken, and remained mysteriously untenanted for nearly a year.

This circumstance was strongly resented by a neighborhood which had testified so strongly by its impetuous conduct to the desirability of the street, the persistent emptiness of this refractory domicile serving as a kind of standing criticism of its hasty judgment. A kind of hauteur seemed to be expressed by its persistent refusal to come into proper relations with the other houses in the block, and by degrees it became distinctly unpopular. Too new to be plausibly accused of being haunted, it was vaguely slandered as possessing defective drainage, and became the subject of other injurious rumors which tended toward making the agent's placards in its lower windows permanent fixtures. And when, after a year's time, it became known that it had at length been let, all its accumulated unpopularity was promptly and unanimously transferred to its occupants as a matter of course.

These were an elderly man and his wife, who apparently had no family and kept no servant. Their few belongings had been moved in before it was even noticed that the place had found a tenant, which was in itself generally regarded as an aggravating circumstance. No one knew the man by name or could find out anything about him. It was strongly resented that from the beginning he kept the green blinds on both the front and the rear of his premises constantly closed, and when it became evident that he did not intend to put out a door-plate, popular feeling rose almost to indignation. He did not even permit himself to be seen very much, only occasionally going forth, while his wife was almost never visible. No one ever seemed to visit the couple,

whose only caller was an occasional expressman with a parcel. Attempts on the part of the male inhabitants of Figg Street to draw the man into conversation encountered a baffling resistance in his shy reticence of manner, while the few ladies who sought to penetrate the secret of the house through the cunning device of a neighborly call were quite unable to get any response to their repeated rings at the doorbell, though they were painfully conscious of being investigated from within through the blinds of the parlor window.

A fever of curiosity pervaded the neighborhood for a time. Social gatherings, assembled under a thin pretext of whist or music, straightway resolved themselves into deliberative bodies sitting upon the question of Number Seventeen. Certain persons even stooped to the employment of small boys as detectives, but these unworthy emissaries failed as completely as did everybody else to solve the mystery of the house. Finally the fever, having run its course, died out, and Number Seventeen came to be accepted as an objectionable but stubborn fact.

For nearly two months matters remained in this unsatisfactory condition, but at the end of that period the excitement was renewed by a very peculiar circumstance. Twice a day, on my way to business, I was obliged to pass these mysterious premises, which still strongly piqued my curiosity without ever having once gratified it ever so little. My interest in the house was just beginning to flag a little when one morning as I was going down to the office my always observant eye noticed a slight but startling change. A single white brick had taken the place of one of the common red ones in the sidewalk in front of Number Seventeen. It was precisely the size of an ordinary brick, and had a smooth, enameled surface of glittering white. I was quite sure that it had not been there the evening before when I came up town; so striking and unusual a detail could hardly have escaped my notice. I puzzled over the matter all day and devoted the evening meal to discussing it with my wife, but without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion. Going down town in the morning I spoke of it to a neighbor, and at night to two more with whom I rode up town. Three or four people called on us that evening to discuss this new phase of the mystery, and as they went home we saw

several small parties from the neighborhood walking up and down by this inexplicable object with an elaborate assumption of indifference, evidently engaged in verifying the strange report which had spread rapidly throughout the street.

For a week there was a revival of the original excitement, manifested by much hypocritical sociability. For a week the white brick was always trumps at whist, and was eaten over and over again in the form of Welsh rabbits of parallel indigestibility. Indeed, the formula of invitation during that period might very reasonably have been "The pleasure of your company is requested at a White Brick," had perfect candor obtained.

We were just beginning to get accustomed to the thing when one morning as I was going down town I missed it. I looked hastily up at the door. Yes, it was Number Seventeen without a doubt, but the white brick was gone.

I made a round of calls that evening with my wife and disseminated this startling information. As the bearers of this important news we enjoyed a quite unusual popularity, and went home in a very pleasant frame of mind. The third morning after, the white brick was again in its former place, the exchange having taken place, as before, some time during the night.

I was very absent-minded over my duties that day, and was more than once sharply reprimanded by my employer for my inattention to the routine of the office. If I had had a brick in my hat, as the slang phrase goes, I could not have been more hopelessly muddled than I was by the white brick which I could not get out of my head. This uncanny happening began to suggest to my mind all kinds of dreadful deeds of which it might be the sign and signal. Was Number Seventeen a den of counterfeiters, thus conclusively but silently indicated to interested persons? Was it a haunt of unspeakable vice, masked by the white purity of this symbol? Were deeds too dreadful to name, or an enterprise too criminal for utterance thus proclaimed? I passed the day in a fever of fruitless speculation and went home with but one clear purpose — to find out when and by whom this baleful message was placed and replaced.

To this end I determined upon an heroic measure. I remembered that the brick had been exposed the first time for precisely

one week. Now, if there were any uniformity in the purpose which lay behind it, it should be again removed on the following Tuesday night. I accordingly determined to sit up all of that night, on this chance, and watch. I passed the interval in a state of great nervous excitement, and upon the appointed evening established myself at my second story front window, which commanded a full view of that part of the sidewalk, with a plentiful supply of cigars, determined to solve the mystery. Sitting there in the darkness I heard the clocks strike eleven, twelve, one, two, three, four, and, I think, five. I fear I must have dozed for a moment, toward morning, however, for when daybreak surprised me at my vigil the confounded thing was gone.

Nearly two days after this it was replaced, remaining, as before, for a week, at the end of which time it again disappeared. All this period I spent in a miserable state of suspense, reading the criminal items which the enterprise of the daily press provided, and striving by the exercise of all my ingenuity to somehow connect the deeds or their doers with this ominous manifestation; but to no purpose. I had said nothing to any one about my futile experiment in detective work, but I was gratified to hear it whispered about that several of my neighbors had also sat up all night with a similar purpose and with similar results.

This had gone on for nearly two months when a brilliant idea came to me. Why on earth had it never occurred to me before? Nothing could be simpler or more promising, nothing surer to bring about something significant — something, at least, affording a clue to the mystery of Number Seventeen. That night I went out secretly at two A. M., in a drizzling rain, and, removing the white brick from the sidewalk where it had been placed two days before, set it in a corresponding position in front of my own door, putting in its place an ordinary red brick.

I slept very little the rest of that night, but, rising early, took up my position at the window to await results. In order to miss nothing I sent word to the office that I was at home with a severe sore throat — which was indeed quite true — and ate my breakfast uncomfortably as I sat at the window.

Nothing happened until eleven o'clock, when the elderly tenant of the suspected premises came out of his door and walked down

the steps. He had not got half-way down, however, when it became evident that he had discovered his loss. He paused in apparent consternation and after looking earnestly at the sidewalk for an instant, ran back with unaccustomed sprightliness into the house. Presently his wife came out with him, and together they carefully examined the footway where the brick had been. If ever two people appeared anxious and alarmed it was this guilty looking twain. All my old suspicions came back to me as I triumphantly beheld the manifest disquietude of the pair, who, after a brief search and a hurried consultation, went quickly back into the house, from which neither emerged again that day. The next morning another white brick had been planted in its usual position in front of Number Seventeen.

The exaggerated alarm which my experiment had caused in my mysterious neighbors made me a little uneasy as to the possible consequences of my act to myself, and, as nothing definite had resulted, I determined after a day or two, to remove the borrowed brick, which, being farther up the street than its owner ever had occasion to go, had remained unnoticed by him, though it had begun to cause amused comment among the neighbors. I had planned to do this upon a certain evening after dark, but on my return from the office that night I found my wife in a state of great doubt and anxiety over a large box which a teamster had left at our house just at dusk.

She had first noticed him driving down from the upper end of the street, looking inquiringly at the houses on our side. At the sight of our white brick he had pulled up suddenly, and taking from his cart a large box had rung our bell and delivered it to our servant without a word of explanation, and then had driven away. Our maid had received it as a matter of course, and there it lay upon the entry floor, marked emphatically upon its upper surface

THIS SIDE UP.
HANDLE WITH EXTREME CARE.

It was an ordinary rough packing case, three feet long by two wide and a foot deep, and was lettered in the bold script employed

by commercial packers. The corners of a tag which had evidently borne an address were still held down by four large tacks, but the greater part of the middle had evidently been torn off in the process of getting the box in at the door and could nowhere be found. There was no doubt at all in my wife's mind, nor in mine, that the case had been intended for our mysterious neighbor, and that the teamster had been led into this blunder in its delivery by our duplicate white brick, which was the first he would encounter in coming down the street from its upper end, and which he had become accustomed, by habit or instruction, to recognize as the sign of his destination. His mistake had, perhaps, placed in my hands the clue to the secret of Number Seventeen.

All my previous doubts and misgivings vanished in the face of this piece of providential good fortune, and sending for a hammer I prepared to have a look at the contents of the box. My wife's tremulous promptings to be careful and her scruples as to the propriety of such an act were evidently mere sops to her conscience, for she was inspired with quite as lively a curiosity as my own. The idea of any physical danger from an infernal machine never entered our heads, so entirely commonplace had been all the circumstances of the delivery of the case. So, adapting the usual loose-handled domestic hammer as well as possible to the unequal task, I finally succeeded in getting the lid off. Upon the folds of brown packing paper which covered its contents lay an envelope, blank and unaddressed.

From such a wrapper I felt no scruples about taking the note which it enclosed, and accordingly did so; but my wife spared me the shame of violating another person's letter by snatching it from my hand and reading it aloud. It ran as follows:

MR. JAMES MILLICAN,

Dear Sir: — The sample sent is a great improvement over the last one, and would, no doubt, be effective against the enemy. We must take no chances in this struggle, however, and when we show our hand it must be to deal a death blow to them. Therefore carry out the improvement you suggest. Do not worry about the cost — at this stage of the game money is nothing. The loss you speak of might be dangerous if the article fell into the right hands, but that is unlikely. We send the chemicals you ask for. Do not take any unnecessary risks. We must guard above all things against a premature explosion.

Yours truly,

SYLVESTER DAFT.

At the word "explosion" my wife turned pale and sat weakly down on the edge of a chair looking at me with a frightened face.

I, however, with a resolute air, but with many internal misgivings, laid hold of the paper which still covered the contents of the box, and prepared to strip it off. As I turned back the first layer the hammer which I had left upon the edge of the case fell to the floor with a crash, which served to show me conclusively the state of my own nerves. I persisted, however, in my unpacking, and presently laid bare the contents. The box was filled, apparently, with a fine white powder and nothing else. It was tasteless and gritty between the teeth, and bore every physical sign of harmlessness. I was greatly disappointed at this poor answer to my expectations and discontentedly plunged my hand into the yielding mass. As I did so my fingers encountered a hard object.

Carefully digging away the white powder I presently disclosed the neck of a large bottle, which I pulled carefully forth. The label bore a Latinized name, quite meaningless to me, but below it was the conspicuous legend: "Dangerous. Keep in a cool place." I complied at once by placing the bottle as far as possible from myself, and cautiously continued my search. There were four more bottles, containing different liquids, and several packages of unknown chemicals, including one of common borax, which I recognized with relief, as one meets a friend in a strange land. The removal of these articles left the case about half full of the powder and gave our front parlor, where they stood about, the appearance of a chemical laboratory. My wife and I could make little out of all this, and after having devoted the evening to vague and profitless discussion, we opened the windows of the room in compliance with the demand printed on the first bottle, and carefully locking the door went upstairs to bed.

But not to sleep. We tossed and turned for several hours, starting at every noise from below, until finally I could stand it no longer, and getting up again I dressed and went down stairs. All was quiet in the parlor, where the chemicals still stood intact. I sat down for an instant in an easy chair where I had them in full view, and there, of all places, fell fast asleep before I had any idea of such a thing.

When I awoke it was half past seven in the morning, and I was stiff with the cold that had poured in all night at the open windows, and had another frightful sore throat. I rose with pain and

difficulty to shut out the chilling draught, and as I stood at the open window commanding a view up the street toward Number Seventeen, I saw Mr. Millican, as I now knew him to be, coming in my direction, which I had never before seen him take. He was walking rapidly, his hands behind him, his eyes looking reflectively down upon the sidewalk.

A wave of apprehension crossed my mind. His route would take him past my house, where he had never, to my knowledge, passed before, and he would certainly see the stolen white brick. What would happen? Would he face me, or would he take alarm and flee? If he did face me, what should I do — resolutely pluck his secret from him in the interests of the public welfare, or consult my own personal safety in as plausible an explanation as I could devise?

Before I could decide he had reached my door. Without an instant's hesitation or the least appearance of surprise he turned and walked up my steps, taking something from his pocket as he did so. I heard a key rattle for an instant in the lock, which cheaply furnished article readily yielded to the intruder, and in another instant Mr. Millican walked into the room where I stood in frightened perplexity.

He looked first at me in great surprise, and then glancing hurriedly about him, his eyes fell upon the opened box. A look of utter consternation appeared on his face and he sat down in a frightened way upon the edge of the case, playing idly with the white powder with his hand, and looking at me with a baffled air.

Presently he cleared his throat.

"I see you are working on the same track," he said, in a dejected voice. "Well, I knew something was up when my experimental brick was stolen, but I'd no idea you were so near. How did you happen to locate here?"

The harmless dejection of his manner and appearance had already removed the worst of my suspicions, and I had decided to make the best explanation I could, but his opening puzzled me.

"I — I don't understand," I began.

"Then you are not Babelon's man," he cried eagerly, rising as he spoke. "You are not working for Babelon & Co. in this matter?"

I hastened to explain that I was not working for Babelon & Co. in any matter, but was in the insurance business; and then, taking advantage of the high good-humor with which this confession seemed to fill him, I made a very frank explanation of the whole matter, to which he listened with great amusement. I returned to him his white brick and the box of chemicals, and during the next two months was privileged to visit him in his laboratory which occupied the cellar of Number Seventeen, where I spent many pleasant evenings over a pipe in his interesting company. At the end of this period I received one morning this circular:

MILLICAN'S ENAMELED BRICK.

For Pavements, Warehouse Flooring and all Building Purposes Demanding

DURABILITY AND CLEANLINESS.

Indestructible by Wear or Fracture, Acid Proof and Hygienically Perfect. The only Flooring that can be Permanently Kept in a State of

CHEMICAL PURITY.

Patented June, 1899, by JAMES MILLICAN.

Manufactured by

SYLVESTER DAFT & CO.,

Dealers in Builders' Supplies and Hygienic Appliances.

Mr. Millican's brick had undergone the practical test of actual wear and tear in the sidewalk of Figg Street, to the consternation of its inhabitants, before it was offered to the public, and so was put upon the market in such a state of perfection as to defy all competition. At any rate, Messrs. Babelon & Co. never, to my knowledge, advertised the competing article which had forced upon Millican so much secrecy in his experiments.

The Rouen Doctor.*

BY MARY EASTWOOD KNEVELS.

RALPH BRANT had nine hours to spend in Rouen on his way to Paris, but not being especially interested in sight-seeing, he made up his mind, over his morning coffee, taken at a café near the station, that they should be spent, partly at least, in a walk through the quaint old streets in the centre of the town.

It is not often that an over-worked London physician gets a six weeks' holiday, and he felt like a boy as he went prying about the narrow courts and dark alleys. A street boy threw some mud at his high hat and spoiled it completely; but even that did not ruffle his good temper, and, finding near by a place where hats were sold he bought a soft black one. Chatting with the woman who sold it to him, he asked many questions about the curious old parts of the city. She was astonished at his fluent French and attracted by his almost boyish manner. "Monsieur is Parisien," she said, "if he had but a little goatee!" The idea amused Brant, and, passing a barber's shop later in the morning, he had his full yellow beard cut into a goatee, which gave him a typically French look. He had been educated for his profession in Paris, and intended to stay there for most of the precious six weeks' holiday, renewing acquaintance with the sights and amusements of his student days.

An hour or so later, sitting at the café, with a glass of vermouth and a cigarette, no one would have known him as an Englishman. He was of medium height, but slender, had pleasant blue eyes, fair hair, and, as a finishing touch, the yellow goatee. Luncheon over, Brant started for the Cathedral, and at noon stood in front of its beautiful façade, the wonder of artists. Lost in admiration, he wandered inside, until, hearing some one speak to him suddenly,

* Copyright, 1899, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

he faced around to find a man, something of his own size and coloring, with just such a soft black hat, speaklng to him:

"Monsieur is a stranger to our beautiful Cathedral," said the Frenchman suavely, as no one but a Frenchman could say it. "I envy the pleasure Monsieur has in store for himself!"

The man's voice was smooth and cultivated. Brant took in, with a trained physician's eye, the intelligent face and well-shaped head, as he said with a *bonhommie* that made him un-English: "It is you, rather, who are to be envied, Monsieur, as a citizen of this charming city."

The Frenchman smiled with pleasure, and, taking out his card-case, presented Brant with a card, on which was inscribed: "Antoine Pierrot, Médecin, Rouen." Brant acknowledged the courtesy by giving in exchange one of his own. Dr. Pierrot scrutinized it, and then said enthusiastically: "Ah! You are also a physician, Monsieur. Allow me the pleasure of walking about with you; perhaps my little knowledge may help you to appreciate better the beauties of our noble Cathedral."

Brant accepted the offer with thanks, and the two waiked off together. Dr. Pierrot was a clever man, with a gift of conversation, and a voice that made listening a pleasure. The two men were soon in the middle of a discussion on architecture which became so interesting to Brant that they went off for dinner together. From architecture, their conversation became more personal, and Brant found himself telling more of his own life and experience than he had told any one for a long while. When the last cup of *café noir* had been drunk, Brant decided to go to the station, and Dr. Pierrot, friendly to the last, walked with him. On their arrival Brant thanked the Frenchman for his kindness and added:

"Monsieur, thanks to you, I shall always remember with pleasure my visit to Rouen."

"Not at all," said the other, politely, "you have more than repaid me with your company; but if you would do me a great favor, Monsieur, as one of the profession, keep your eye on a patient of mine, who is to travel to Paris to-night in a first-class compartment, No. 6. She will need no care, as I will arrange her comfortably, and give her a sleeping draught before you start. Her nurse will meet her at the station in Paris; but, in case she

should awake, I would thank you to assist her as much as is necessary."

"No trouble at all," answered Brant, glad to return the other's attentions so easily.

"As soon, then, as the train is made up," said Dr. Pierrot, "I will arrange everything; until then, good-bye!" They shook hands and parted.

Brant walked up and down for some time, smoking his cigar, and watching the fuss and excitement of getting a foreign train together, and his interest was so great that he only got back to his compartment just as the train, with a final shriek, rolled out of the station into the night.

Brant settled himself comfortably, with the ease of an experienced traveller, and then looked at his companion. She was sitting back in the corner. A broad feather-trimmed black hat partly hid her face, and a lace scarf, tied around her throat, shaded her mouth and chin. Her hands, in long suéde gloves, lay idly clasped in her lap. She was evidently dozing, so Brant settled himself again in the opposite corner and began to read his paper. The journey to Paris is a comparatively short one, and the train swung along at a good speed. It was some time later when Brant looked again at his temporary patient, but she was still asleep. Her head was bent forward on her breast; her hands, before loosely clasped, were clutched tightly together. If she had given him the ghost of an excuse, the doctor would have started a conversation out of pure curiosity to see what kind of a face the over-shadowing hat concealed, but, although he made more or less noise, changed his position, opened the window, and otherwise tried to attract her attention, all his efforts were useless; she still slept on, never moving, except to sway a little with the motion of the cars.

Finally, giving up the idea of seeing his companion's face, the doctor dropped into an uneasy doze himself, and was awakened only by the unlocking of the compartment door at the Gare St. Lazare. He alighted, but mindful of his friend's parting request, waited for the arrival of the nurse. Apart from the usual crowd of sleepy passengers and noisy *commissionaires* no one was in sight. He looked up and down for a few minutes; then, thinking

she might be in the waiting-room, started off to find her, afraid that the girl, finding herself deserted, would become nervous. But the waiting-room was empty. He loitered a few moments longer, and was then about to return to his charge, when an officer, accompanied by two men in plain clothes, barred his way. Years afterward Brant remembered that brisk, matter-of-fact announcement: "Monsieur, you are under arrest!" The little episode passed unnoticed by all but a few loiterers.

Brant shook himself indignantly as he felt the officer's hand on his shoulder, but realizing the uselessness of fighting against such odds, he said quietly, but angrily: "What is this for? If you want the custom dues, here is my bag; but as there is nothing in it you can want, look in it, and let me go. I am in a hurry."

The elder of the two detectives — for their profession was plain — said civilly enough: "Monsieur is arrested for the murder of the young girl, name unknown, who was just found dead in compartment No. 6 of the Rouen express!"

Brant had had many curious experiences in his life, and was a clear-headed man, but even before the full horror of it all broke upon him, he saw the chain of circumstantial evidence against him. He answered the officer of the law as coolly as possible, though his face whitened as he remembered how he had noticed the changed position of the girl's hands. "Good Heavens!" he thought, she had died there within a few feet of him, and he utterly unconscious of it!

"I can explain it easily," he said, to the detective who spoke, "it is a dreadful accident, of which I am as innocent as you!"

"Monsieur must remember that everything he says will be used in evidence against him," answered the detective quietly, "and, innocent or guilty, he must spend the night in prison."

As they passed the waiting-room door, he saw stretched on a table a black figure, with two long, gloved arms hanging limply down, and caught a glimpse of a horribly distorted face, that seemed to stare at him in a ghastly fashion, now that the big hat was off, and the head only covered with childish yellow curls. A look of horror was manifest on the physician's face. "Dead!" he thought, "and I might have saved her, if I had only known!" His hand went involuntarily to the little case of drugs and

instruments in his pocket. The officer, misunderstanding the motion, instantly put a pistol to his head. Brant laughed. "You do not understand," he said bitterly in English, and they left the station.

During the drive to the prison Brant could not shake off the horror of the thing. The girl's face returned to him with a persistency that overthrew the natural feeling of indignation and sense of justice that reasoned thus: How could any one suspect him of committing such a murder — if murder it was? He could prove his innocence easily enough, and his English friends would help him as an English subject. First of all, the Doctor of Rouen must be found; let him only have a chance to explain.

The carriage stopped abruptly, and he was helped out. In a small room where sat an officer of the law, Brant was searched. His letters and case were taken from him, and his name and description and the particulars of his arrest were put down in a big book. Then he was locked in a cell.

Toward morning he regained his usual calm, and something of the hopefulness that had left him so completely the night before. It was four o'clock in the afternoon before the chance to explain came. The hearing opened with the testimony of the officers who had arrested him, and of the guard of the train, who, in closing the carriages for the night, had discovered the girl's dead body, and who identified Brant as having been in the compartment with her all the way from Rouen. Two physicians gave a detailed account of the dead girl's condition. She had been dead about three hours when found, and must have died while on the train. There was no possibility of her having been dead when put there. She had been poisoned, without a doubt, by means of an ingenious mixture of morphine with a more violent drug — the former probably administered after the other had partly taken effect. The dead girl's lips and tongue were burned as though with acid, but otherwise there was no outward sign of pain, except her expression, which even the hardened doctors both mentioned.

Then Brant was allowed to speak. He gave a straightforward description of each act since his departure from England. He told how he had noticed a certain similarity in looks between Dr. Pierrot and himself, and then went on with a description of the

loss of his hat, the change in his beard, and many other almost forgotten, but now important, incidents. The change in the position of the girl's hands, which must have occurred about the time it was agreed that she probably died, was evidence against himself, but he omitted nothing in his frank statement. At the end he was asked a few searching questions as to Dr. Pierrot's looks and manner.

The final witness was the station master of Rouen, who identified Brant as the man who had put an apparently helpless girl into compartment No. 6 and had then gone away, returning just before the train left. The weight of evidence was so heavy against him, that he was not surprised at being held for further trial. Before being returned to his cell, he was taken to a room where lay the body of the unfortunate girl. He looked long and earnestly at her. She was young, and dressed with great care, in a dark gown of thin material, and a velvet cape covered her shoulders. Her face was curiously childish, and would have been pretty but for its pallor and drawn expression. The long yellow gloves were new and so were the dainty patent leather boots. Dr. Brant was formally asked to identify the victim, and of course declared that he could not do so.

The English consul came to see Brant, and a well-known lawyer was appointed to conduct his case. But time dragged heavily to the innocent prisoner, and it was a great relief when, at the end of six weeks, the limit of his vacation, his case was called. To his intense surprise it was not held in open court, but in the same room as before, and there were only a few present. No one, in fact, outside the court officials, the English consul and his secretary. The same evidence was gone over. The girl's name could not be discovered, and that was the stumbling-block of the whole affair. While this was favorable to Brant, another point was against him — no evidence seemed to be obtainable from Rouen of Dr. Pierrot, and Brant's lawyer had not a witness to prove his existence. The whole affair was conducted with great secrecy, and Brant was treated with a consideration that struck him, Englishman as he was, with surprise. At the end of the so-called trial, he was taken to a larger and more comfortable cell, and books and cigars were given him.

Another dreary time passed. One evening, nearly three months afterward, the detective who had arrested him entered Brant's cell in full evening dress.

"Monsieur," he said, "if you should see Dr. Pierrot of Rouen to-night, though disguised, would you know him?"

"I never forget a face," he answered.

"In that case," replied the detective, "with the help of a tailor and a barber, I shall expect you to be ready to go out with me in an hour."

Brant was furnished with evening clothes of the best cut and quality, and the goatee which he had worn since that eventful day in Rouen was removed. The detective pinned several medals to the English doctor's coat, and placed a broad ribbon across his breast over his waistcoat. Then he was blindfolded with a heavy handkerchief, and helped into a carriage. He offered no resistance, feeling that the mystery that enshrouded the whole affair was at last to be dissipated, and he was anxious only to have it over. Justice he hardly hoped for. His counsel had assured him that freedom was all he could expect.

The drive was a short one. When the carriage stopped and the bandage was taken from his eyes he found himself standing on a wide piece of crimson carpet, that led up several steps. Everything was brilliantly lighted, and music could be plainly heard. Brant followed the detective up the steps, and, after leaving their overcoats in a cloak-room, went into the largest ball-room he had ever seen. It was full of people in evening dress, some dancing, some walking about, but his guide, his arm loosely thrust in his, passed through these and led him up to where two throne-like chairs were placed on a square of scarlet. Around it stood officers in uniform, and ladies in evening dress, gorgeous with jewels, and there among them, in a group close beside the throne, stood Monsieur Pierrot, the Doctor of Rouen!

It was intimated to Brant on his return from the ball that he had better cross the Channel without delay, and so the mystery of the Rouen Doctor was never solved for him.

Back To Nature.*

BY HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS.

IT was the end of Miss Florence Caxton's visit to the ranch. The two months of rest had benefited her wonderfully, and there was a look of pensive melancholy on her face as she stood in the door-way, habited for her last ride.

Miss Florence was good to look upon, whatever her frame of mind might be, but this soft, sad little expression became her particularly.

Tall women are more emphatic in their quieter moods.

She was very sorry to leave her kind friends, the superintendent and his wife — Mr. and Mrs Stetson. And then, too, there was Jim. One could hardly be expected to leave him without a pang, even if one's mind were set upon a higher education and a glorious career.

For Jim was a truly remarkable young man. If there was any virtue that he lacked, it only served to set off to greater advantage those he possessed. Was there another man on earth so gentle in his strength, so brave and yet so thoughtful, with such a ready wit and sympathetic soul, such a contrast of poetry and common-sense, and withal, so handsome? Florence thought not, and as she was a very observant young woman, it is quite likely that she was right.

Both the vegetables of friendship and the flowers of love blossom quickly in the West, where the artificial barriers are down, and one may see more in a week of the real nature of a companion than a year would show in a more conventional country, and as Jim had been her escort, guide and fast friend for two solid months, it was not strange that Florence's heart had gone out to him.

* Copyright, 1899, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

She cared far more than she really knew, for, in spite of many graces, she had a stubbornness of spirit that made her most resolute in anything she undertook, and her soul was bent on taking a post-graduate course and afterward entering on a "career" — which, of course, meant that poor Jim must be cast into the outer darkness. She had looked at things in the light of her plans so long that she did not realize how strong a hold the handsome young centaur had upon her affections.

There was no mistaking Jim's frame of mind. Love spoke in every glance of his eye, every touch of his hand — a fine, manly, dignified love that was hard to cast aside.

"But I must," said the girl, though her heart sank at the thought, "I must do it. I don't want to be a rancher's wife, and I am sure if I yielded it would only bring misery to both of us."

The object of her thoughts cut short her soliloquy by cantering up to the door. He was brave and debonnair in a new sombrero, yellow silk neckerchief and "chaps" with fringe a foot long — six-foot-one of solid manhood; honest, active muscles, honest, active brain, and honest, active soul, all first-class material from his head to his heels. Very handsome he looked in his dress of the Western cavalier.

Florence gave him a stealthy looking-over from behind the safe shadow of her long lashes. Certainly he was a goodly man. Oh, what a pity it was!

"Ready, Florence?"

"All ready, Jim."

"Then up you go!"

The light way she sprang into the saddle testified to the elasticity of her muscles. Jim watched the supple figure with a look of love and pride that glorified him, before he swung himself upon his horse and followed her.

"Where away for our last ride, Jim?"

There was no intentional coquetry in the little lingering over the "last," nor in the softness of the glance that went with it, for human nature will have its way when one breathes prairie air on a September day as pure and bright as crystal, yet it was cruel, for she intended to deny both.

The young man's heart beat high and fast, but he answered lightly:

"To the Castle Buttes — the one thing you have not seen, except in the distance. I kept them for dessert."

After an hour's steady loping they began to climb the long, even slope of grass that was crested by the Castle Buttes, great crags of stone which rudely mimicked battlement and tower.

The two human beings seemed like insects as they wound through the rocks, leading up to the highest peak.

There before them the landscape rolled away to a limitless horizon. The sun rode the heavens in pomp and majesty. The air was warm, with a taste of coolness it it. A tender little perfume came from the dried grasses under foot.

The girl looked for a time in silence on the vastness around her. Then she spread out her hands. "The world is ours, Jim!" she said. He laid his hand upon hers, and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Is it, Florence?" he asked very softly, "Is it mine?"

"I don't know what you mean, Jim!" she answered a little wildly.

"Then I shall make it as plain as words can. I love you with all the heart there is in me — will you be my wife?"

"Oh, don't, don't!" she cried, repelling him. "It is too bad! O Jim, I am so sorry. Why did you ask me?"

"It is 'no,' then?" he said quietly.

She nodded assent.

"You do not love me, Florence?"

She set her lips tight together and looked into the distance with miserable eyes.

"Will you not answer me?"

Then she broke down. "Oh, I don't want to answer anything!" she sobbed. "It can't be, but I am so unhappy! I am, Jim! I am!"

"Tell me about it." The gentleness of the tone moved her, and she poured out her story in disjointed sentences.

As he listened the man's face grew stern. His lips curled scornfully: "I do not love you so, dear, as I love honors more," he misquoted, turning the fine old words into a mockery.

"Oh, don't put it that way! my career — "

He drew himself up to his full, stately height. "I had fancied that *I* was career enough for the woman who loved me," he said.

Very proud and handsome he looked as he said it. Florence's heart almost melted. Then she gathered her resolution at a leap, and clung to it with blind desperation.

"Let us go," she said.

They rode back in chilling silence. Jim spoke not one word, which added a pang to the girl's misery — he took it far too quietly. She had thought of playing the Queen when this time came (as come it must she well knew), but that he might play the Emperor was not in her calculations.

At last he stopped.

"It is only two miles to the ranch, Florence," he said. "I cannot go in with you to-day. You will excuse me, I know — Good-bye."

She held out her hand, entreating him with her beautiful eyes, but his blood was up and he refused to see it.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He wheeled and started on the trail for the horse-camp, twenty miles away. She watched him far into the distance — but he never turned his head.

At last she headed her horse for home. As she neared the ranch house she, too, rebelled at the thought of facing kindly Mr. and Mrs. Stetson. Her mind was so full of turmoil and trouble that she felt she must be alone for awhile. She saw the mouth of Sweetbriar Gulch standing invitingly open, and without thinking of the warnings she had received, plunged through it to the Bad-lands beyond. The God-forsaken Bad-lands, with its strange and desolate grandeur, upon whose maze of cañons and gulches even the Indian enters with caution, and in which the stranger may expect to be hopelessly lost in a mile of traveling. Every one who has been in a city where the streets are laid out by chance knows how easy it is to become confused in the unfamiliar surroundings. Then imagine this country, miles in extent, where the ways twist and turn upon themselves like a tangled string, and where the landmarks are almost duplicates of each other at every

second or third turn! It is told of one rancher that after three days of wandering in this man-trap he gave up the struggle and scratched his will upon his saddle — and was found the next morning within two miles of his own door.

When the coming darkness roused Florence from her reverie, all the warnings she had received, all the stories of the danger of the country rushed upon her. She galloped frantically through one after another of the many paths that opened, until, with a sudden chill at her heart, she realized that she was lost.

At last, tired out, she threw herself upon the ground. Thirst, that she had not noticed before, clutched her throat, and there is no water in the desert Bad-lands, only heat and Death, and huge, grotesque statuary, carved by wind and water out of the earth. The sickening fear caused by her perilous situation parched the girl's mouth still more.

She was lost, lost! She might wander through the endless ways until worn out; the coyotes would snarl and scramble over her bones. She shrieked aloud at the thought, and the echoes caught up her cry and yelled and screamed in mockery — now near, now far — a hideous clamor in the quiet of the night.

The sobs came then, slow, choking sounds at first, that ended in a paroxysm of wild weeping.

"O Jim!" she cried, "If you could only see me now, you would be sorry!" Ah, if he only could see her now, if she had his strength and courage to rely on! Face to face with the hereafter in the darkness, how squalid and mean her ambition seemed — how great the homage of a brave and honest heart!

The stars came out in splendor and soothed her with their quiet company.

"God is love," the girl thought, "and I have turned love aside for vanity. This is to punish me!"

Strangely enough, the thought brought comfort with it. She knelt and prayed, pouring her trouble into the lap of her Creator with the simplicity of a little child. Then she threw herself upon the ground and soon was calmly sleeping.

In the morning she awoke with a start. There before her sat a blanketed figure, as motionless as bronze. She stared at it in wonder, thinking her fancy was playing her a trick.

Then it spoke: "How!" it said.

"How," answered Florence, falteringly.

"Wachitah squaw lost?" asked the Indian.

"Yes, yes, I am!" she cried, and running over seized the savage's lean hands in a frenzied grip. "Oh, take me away, take me away!"

"Shinto!" he answered, nodding his head in vigorous assent and producing a flask. "You want water?"

She clutched it and drained its contents. It was warm and smelled of whiskey, but how good it tasted!

"Neah owyah?" continued her savior, bringing forth a piece of bread. The famished girl finished that in a twinkling.

"I good Injun," said the Indian, when the bread had disappeared. "Name Strong Bull — Jim friend — you Jim's squaw — see ride horse last night in Bad-land. Strong Bull come — squaw get lost — Strong Bull find — take to Jim now — dam good, huh? Cooa nah."

He helped her to mount the horse, and, beckoning for her to follow, started off at a swinging trot. They turned and twisted through so many paths that Florence almost lost faith in her guide.

Suddenly he stopped, holding up a hand to command silence.

"Washtay!" (good) he cried, and sprang forward like a deer. Florence had to whip her pony to keep up with him. One more turn — and then! — There lay the open prairie, smiling sweetly in the morning sun. A mist swam across the girl's eyes as she looked at it.

"Kola meatow, lache cooa nah!" (my friend, come over here) shouted the Indian.

Florence turned. Not a hundred yards away rode Jim, just out of hearing of the rescue party he was leading.

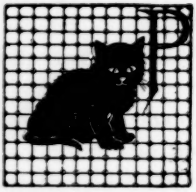
She held out both arms.

"Jim!" was all she said.

But he understood; and so did the silent witnesses.

Poker Jim's Mahala.*

BY MIRIAM MICHELSON.



POKER JIM was miserable. He was hungry, he was cold, he was bereft.

Things had come to a pretty pass when an Indian's own squaw refuses to support him. It was Christmas eve, too, and every buck in town was preparing to celebrate. There was to be a poker game down below the Savage dump, where the wickiups were pitched. It was bound to be a great game, for the squaws had been kept busy by the miners' wives, scrubbing and cleaning for Christmas, so their husbands were well provided with funds.

All except Jim, Poker Jim. He could not be there.

Cruel Mahala, to desert your man at a time like this!

The worst of it was that his disgrace was so public.

Piute Sam had begun it by lounging up with a formal invitation to where Jim, in his red blanket, sprawled on the edge of the sidewalk, from which the snow had been swept. He was lying there, eating pine nuts and chatting with the other bucks.

A free translation of Sam's guttural, ironical, consonant-choked speech was: "Oh, won't you come and play wiz me, play wiz me, play wiz me?"

Jim's great, square, red-painted face grew morose as he listened. His beady, black eyes shot a vicious glance at wicked, wrinkled old Sam.

He didn't care to play, Jim explained. It was too cold, and there was no moon, and —

And then Sam looked slyly at Washoe George, and they all burst into a roar of sarcastic laughter, and Jim got up, and, wrapping his blanket close about him, walked away, trembling to the very feather in his old straw hat with indignation.

* Copyright, 1899, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

Oh, could Mahala Susie have seen her man then, as he walked off lonely and unhappy, she must have relented!

But Mahala Susie just then was up on the hill, where, since her desertion of Jim, she had slept in the little woodshed adjoining the house whose floors her worn, red-brown hands kept clean and smelling of brown soap.

Susie had gone off to her bed in the woodshed early. She had worked since dawn. She had washed every window in the house, she had done the week's washing, she had scrubbed the kitchen, she had waited upon the busy mother while she trimmed the Christmas tree, which they had left over night in the woodshed, that the curious children might not see it till Christmas night.

Susie divested herself first of her street costume, a gaudy, red calico skirt and a purple plaid jacket. Then she took off her working gown beneath, a sober, dirty, suds-colored one. Her emergency rig came next, and an old flannel wrapper that had been given her the day before was also removed. Mahala Susie was really not ill-looking when the greater part of her wardrobe had been shed. One could well understand Jim's valuation of her and the extent of his loss, in realizing the strength of those broad hips and round, coppery, muscular arms.

Poor Jim! I wonder whether Mahala thought of him as she untied a bag of coarse sacking from her waist and slipped it under the rags that made her bed; Jim, utterly resourceless, deserted, a target for mocking words and cruel jeers! And here lay Mahala, a capitalist, a gorgeous peregrinating wardrobe, with a bag that chinked alluringly.

Mahala Susie's eyelids grew heavy. She looked about the well-filled shed, smelt the piney, resinous split wood piled up to the ceiling. She turned luxuriously upon her couch and her gaze fell upon the decorated Christmas tree in the corner, mounted upon its box and ready for transportation into the parlor. A giggle shook Susie's fat breast, as she recalled how craftily she had outwitted the children of the house in their attempts to gain entrance into the woodshed.

But the giggle was never finished. In the small square opening, immediately above the tree, a broad, red face, framed in two hanging black braids, appeared.

It was Jim. He had found her.

A hushed dialogue, like the muffled crash of broken crockery followed. Jim would enter and treat with the enemy. Susie was obdurate. Then, from the tiny window, Jim spoke. He discoursed eloquently upon the poker game and his well-known skill thereat. He dwelt upon his wrongs, his sufferings, the ridicule of the bucks, the giggling of the mahalas. He implored, he entreated. Susie would not yield. She had not been down to the campboodie for a week. Consequently, she had a week's earnings in her bag. She felt like a man of property, haughty, independent, implacable.

Jim's tone changed. He threatened. He swore. Oaths in Piute and English rattled from his accomplished tongue.

Susie, strong of limb and stanch of heart, intrenched, besides, in her own woodshed fortress, feared him not.

The necessity for gesture came upon the red man. How could he impress upon this shirking spouse her duties and responsibilities, when only his face, like a wrathful, clouded, copper moon, was visible to her!

Jim's face disappeared and a great fist shot through the aperture, which shook threateningly at Susie. But the gesture was only sketched. For the hand came in contact with an object which Jim tore from its position and drew out through the window. It was a great, flaxen-haired wax doll from the top of the Christmas tree.

But now Susie was moved. She abandoned the insolent ease of her reclining position and flew to the rescue.

Too late! Jim's mocking face appeared again at the window and another parley followed.

Susie resisted, hoping against hope. She knew she had been outwitted. Let little Molly's Christmas doll be sacrificed? Never!

When Jim, in pretended rage, opened his pocket knife, seized the doll and, holding it toward the aperture, began to scalp it, Susie capitulated. She opened the woodshed door and Jim entered.

Down toward the dumps, where the bucks sit in a blanketed circle about the campfire, gambling, and the chattering squaws huddle together, strode Jim, the conqueror, and Mahala Susie fol-

lowed. As Jim had explained, her absence was no longer necessary or logical, now that he had all her money.

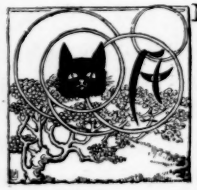
So she followed him, her bowed, strapped head, from which the papoose in his basket depended, raised now and then to take her man's measure. After all, he was the tallest, the best-natured, the cleverest poker player on the Comstock. Susie was a philosopher, besides being a Piute.

And Jim, the triumphant, bore no malice. He had all the more money for the great game to-night, seeing that Susie had not given him her wages daily. He, being an improvident, careless, generous fellow, would have spent it all by this time. Susie was merely his savings bank. He'd had a little difficulty in opening that bank, but it was the Christmas spirit, perhaps, that fostered the forgiving mood in Jim. He burst upon the assembled Piutes down at the dump with the heartiest of greetings. Being a poor, untutored savage, he could not express his emotion, but his beaming face was eloquent of universal benevolence. If he had known how, he would have said in all sincerity:

"On earth, peace. Good will to men."

A Humble Abolitionist.*

BY WILL N. HARBEN.



ANDREW DUNCAN and his wife trudged along the unshaded road in the beating sunshine and paused to rest under the gnarled white-trunked sycamore trees. She wore a drooping gown of checked homespun, a sun-bonnet of the same material, the hood of which was stiffened with invisible strips of cardboard, and a pair of coarse shoes just from the shop. Her husband was barefooted, his shirt was soiled, and he wore no coat to hide the fact. His trousers were worn to shreds about the ankles, but their knees were patched with new cloth.

"I never was as thirsty in all my born days," he panted, as he looked down into the bluish depths of the spring. "Geewhilikins! ain't it hot?"

"An' some fool or other's run off with the drinkin'-goard," chimed in his wife. "Now ain't that jest our luck?"

"We'll have to lap it up dog-fashion, I reckon," Andrew replied ruefully, "an' this is the hardest spring to git down to I ever seed. Hold on, Ann; I'll fix you."

As he spoke he knelt on the moss by the spring, turned his broad-brimmed felt hat outside in, and tightly folded it in the shape of a big dipper. He filled it with water, and, still kneeling, held it up to his wife. When their thirst was satisfied they turned off from the road into a path leading up a gradual slope, on the top of which stood a three-roomed log cabin.

"They are waitin' for us," remarked Duncan. "I see 'em out in the passage. My Lord, I wonder what under the sun they'll do with Big Joe. Ever' time I think of the whole business I mighty nigh bu'st with laughin'."

Mrs. Duncan smiled under her bonnet.

* Copyright, 1899, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

"I think it's powerful funny myself," she said, as she followed after him, her new shoes creaking and crunching on the gravel. To this observation Duncan made no response, for they were now in front of the cabin.

An old man and an old woman sat in the passage, fanning their faces with turkey-wing fans. They were Peter Gill and his wife, Lucretia. The latter rose from her chair, which had been tilted back against the wall, and, with clattering heels, shambled into the room on the right.

"I reckon you'd ruther set out heer whar you kin ketch a breath o' air from what little's afloat," she said cordially, as she emerged, a chair in either hand. Placing the chairs against the wall opposite her husband she took a pair of turkey wings from a nail on the wall and handed them to her guests and resumed her seat with a grunt of relief. For a moment no one spoke, but Duncan presently broke the silence.

"Well, I went an' seed Colonel Whitney for you," he began, his blue eyes twinkling with inward amusement. "An', Pete Gill, I'm powerfully afeerd you are in fur it. As much as you've spoke agin slave-holdin' as a practice, you've got to make a start at it. The Colonel said that you held a mortgage on Big Joe, an' ef you don't take 'im right off you won't get a red cent for yore debt."

"I'm prepared for it," burst from Mrs. Gill. "I tried my level best to keep Mr. Gill from lendin' the money, but nothin' I could say would have the least influence on 'im. The Lord only knows what we will do. We are purty lookin' folks to own a high-priced, stuck-up quality nigger."

The two visitors exchanged covert glances of amusement.

"How did you manage to git caught?" Andrew asked, crushing a subtle smile out of his face with his broad red hand.

Peter Gill had grown quite red in the face and down his wrinkled, muscular neck. As he took off his brogans to cool his feet and began to scratch his toes through his woolen socks, it was evident to his questioner that he was not only embarrassed but angry.

"The thousand dollars was all the money we was ever able to save up," he said. "I was laying off to buy the fust piece o' good land that was on the market, so me'n the ol' 'oman would have a

support in old age. But I didn't see no suitable farm just then, an' as my money was lyin' idle in the bank, Lawyer Martin advised me to put it out at intrust, an' I kinder tuck to the notion. Then Colonel Whitney got wind o' the matter an' rid over an' said, to accommodate me, he'd take the loan. He fust gave me a mortgage on some swampy land over in Murray, that Martin said was wuth ten thousand, an' it run on that way fur two yeer. The fust hint I had of the plight I was in was when the Colonel couldn't pay the intrust. Then I went to another lawyer, for it looked like Martin an' the Colonel was kinder in cahoot, an' my man diskivered that the lan' had been sold long before it was mortgaged to me for taxes. My lawyer wasn't no fool, so he got Whitney in for a game o' open an' shut swindle. He up an' notified 'im that ef my claim wasn't put in good shape in double quick time, he was goin' to put the clamps on somebody. Well, the final upshot was that I tuck Big Joe as security, an' now that the Colonel's entire estate has gone to flinders, I've got the nigger an' my money's gone."

Duncan waited for the speaker to resume, but the aspect of the case was so disheartening that Gill declined to say more about it. He simply hitched one of his heels up on the last rung of his chair and began to fan himself vigorously.

"I did as you wanted me to," said Duncan, wiping his brow and combing his long, damp hair with his fingers. "I went round an' axed the opinion o' several good citizens, an' it is the general belief ef you don't take the nigger you won't never git back a cent o' yore loan. But the funniest part o' the business is the way Big Joe acts about it." Duncan met his wife's glance and laughed out impulsively. "You see, Gill, in the Whitney break-up, all the other niggers has been sold to rich families, an' the truth is, Big Joe feels his dignity tuck down a good many pegs by bein' put off on you-uns, that never owned a slave to yore name. The other darkies has been a-teasin' of 'im all day, an' he's sick an' tired of it. The Whitneys has spiled 'im bad. They l'arnt 'im to read an' always let 'im stan' dressed up in his long coat in the big front hall to invite quality folks in the house. They say he had his eye on a yaller gal, an' he'll have been obliged to give her up, for she's gone with one of the Staffords in Fannin' County."

Gill's knee, which was thrust out in front of him by the sharp bend of his leg, was quivering.

"Big Joe might do a sight wuss'n to belong to me," he said, warmly. "I don't know as we-uns'll have any big hall for 'im to cavort about in, nur anybody any wuss'n yore sort to come to see us, but we pay our debts an' have a plenty t'eat."

Mrs. Gill was listening to this ebullition, her red nose slightly elevated, and she made no effort to suppress a chuckle of satisfaction over her husband's subtle allusion to the status of their guests.

"I want you two jest to come heer one minute," she burst out suddenly, and, with a dignity that seemed to cool the air about her, she rose and moved towards the little shed room at the end of the cabin. Duncan and his wife followed, an expression of half-fearful curiosity in their tawny visages. Reaching the door of the room, Mrs. Gill pushed it open and coolly signalled them to enter, and when they had done so, and stood mutely looking about them, she followed.

"When I made up my mind we'd be obliged to take Big Joe," she explained, "I fixed up for 'im a little. Look at that bedstead!" (Her hand was extended towards it as steadily as the limb of an oak.) "Ann Duncan, you are at liberty to try to find a better one in this neighborhood. You'n Andrew sleep on one made out'n poles with the bark on it. Then jest feel o' them thar feathers in this new tick an' pillows, an' them's bran new store bought sheets."

This second open allusion to her own poverty had a subduing effect on Mrs. Duncan's risibilities. The ever-present twinkle of amusement went out of her eyes, and she had an attitude of vast consideration for the words of her hostess as she put her perspiring hand on the mattress and pressed it tentatively.

"It's saft enough fur a king," she observed, conciliation enough for any one in her tone, "he'll never complain, I bound you!"

"Big Joe won't have to tech his bare feet to the floor while he's puttin' on his clothes, nuther," reminded Mrs. Gill. She raised her eyebrows as an admiral might after seeing a well-directed shot from one of his guns blow up a ship, and pointed at a piece of rag carpet laid at the side of the bed. "An' you see I've fixed 'im a washstand with a new pan thar in the corner, an' a roller towel, an' bein' as they say he's so fixy, I'm a-goin' to fetch in the lookin'-

glass, an' I've cut some pictur's out'n newspapers that I intend to paste up on the walls, so as — "

Mrs. Gill paused. Experienced as she was in the tricks of Ann Duncan's facial expression, she at once divined that her words were meeting with amused opposition.

"Why, Mis' Gill," was Ann's rebuff, "shorely you ain't a-goin' to let 'im sleep in the same house with you-uns!"

"Of course I am, Ann Duncan, what in the name o' common sense do you mean?"

"Oh, nuthin'." Mrs. Duncan glanced at her husband and wiped a cowardly smile from her broad mouth with her hand. "You see, Mis' Gill, I'm afeerd you are goin' to over-do it. You've heard me say I have good stock in me, ef I am poor. I've got own second cousins that don't know the'r own slaves when they meet 'em in the big road. I've heerd how they treat their niggers, an' I'm afeerd all this extra fixin' up will make folks poke fun at you. To-day in town, the niggers started the laugh on Big Joe theirselves, an' the white folks all j'ined in. It looked like they thought it was a good joke for the Gill lay-out to own a quality slave. Me'n Andrew don't mean no harm, but, now, it *is* funny; you know it is!"

"I don't see a thing that's the least bit funny in it." Mrs. Gill bristled and turned almost white in helpless fury. "We never set ourselves up as wantin' to own slaves, but when this one is saddled on us through no fault o' our'n, I see no harm in our holdin' on to 'im till we kin see our way out without loss. As to 'im not sleepin' in the same cabin we do, whar in the Lord's creation would we put 'im? The corn-crib is the only thing with a roof on it, an' it's full to the door."

"Oh, I reckon you are doin' the best you kin," granted Mrs. Duncan, as she passed out of the door and went back to where Peter Gill sat fanning himself. He had overheard part of the conversation.

"I told Lucretia she oughtn't to fix up so almighty much," he observed. "A nigger ain't like no other livin' cre'ture. A pore man jest cayn't please 'em."

Ann Duncan was driven to the very verge of laughter again.

"What you goin' to call 'im?" she snickered, her strong effort

at keeping a serious face bringing tears into her eyes. "Are you goin' to make 'im say Marse Gill an' Mis' Lucretia?"

"I don't care a picayune what he calls us," answered Gill testily. "I reckon we won't start a new language on his account."

Through this colloquy Mrs. Duncan had been holding her sun bonnet in a tight roll in her hands. She now unfurled it like the flag of a switchman and whisked it on her head.

"Well, I wish you luck with yore slave," she was heard to say, crisply, "but I hope you'll not think me meddlin' ef I say that you'll have trouble. Folks like you-uns, an' we-uns fur that matter, don't know no more about managin' slaves raised by high-falutin' white folks than doodle-bugs does." And having risen to that climax, Ann Duncan, followed by her splay-footed, admiring husband, departed.

The next morning, accompanied by Big Joe and the man who had been overseer on his plantation, Colonel Whitney drove over in a spring wagon.

"I decided to bring Joe over myself, so as to have no misunderstanding," he announced. "The other negroes have been picking at him a good deal and he is a little out of sorts, but he'll get all right."

The Gills were standing in the passage, a look of stupid embarrassment on their honest faces. Despite their rugged strength of character they were not a little awed by the presence of such a prominent member of the aristocracy, notwithstanding the fact that their dealings with the Colonel had not, in a financial way, been just to their fancy.

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," Peter found himself able to enunciate.

The Colonel lighted a cigar and began to smoke. A careworn, sad expression lay in his big blue eyes. He had the appearance of a man who had not slept for a week. His tired glance swept from the Gills to the negro in the wagon, and he said huskily:

"Bounce out, Joe, and do the very best you can. I hate to part with you, but you know my condition — we've talked that over enough."

Slowly the tall black man crawled out at the end of the wagon and stood alone on the ground. The expression of his face was

at once so full of despair and fiendishness that Mrs. Gill shuddered and looked away from him.

"Well, Gill," said the planter, "I reckon me and you are even at last. I'm going down to Savannah, where I hope to get a fresh start and amount to more in the world. Good-bye to you — good-bye, Joe."

He had only nodded to the pair in the passage, but he reached over the wheel for the hand of the negro, and, as he took it, a tender expression of regret stamped itself on his strong features.

"Be a good boy, Joe," he half whispered. "As God is my heavenly judge, I hate this more than anything else in the world. If I could possibly raise the money I'd take you with me — or free you."

The thick, stubborn lip of the slave relaxed and fell to quivering.

"Good-bye, Marse Whit'," he said simply.

The Colonel took a firmer grasp of the black hand.

"No ill-will, Joe?" he questioned, anxiously.

"No, suh, Marse Whit', I hain't got no hard feelin's 'gin' you."

"Well, then good-bye, Joe. If ever I get my head above water, I'll keep my promise about you and Liza. She looked on you as her favorite, but don't raise your hopes too high. I'm an old man, now, and it may be up-hill work down there."

The negro lowered his head and the overseer drove on. As the wagon rumbled down the rocky slope a wisp of blue smoke from the Colonel's cigar followed it like a banner unfurled to the breeze. For several minutes after the wagon had disappeared Big Joe stood where he had lighted, his eyes upon the ground.

"What's the matter?" asked Gill, stepping down to him.

"Nothin', Marse — " Big Joe seemed to bite into the word as it rose to his tongue, then he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and looked down again.

The Gills exchanged ominous glances and there was a pause.

"Have you had anything to eat this morning?" Gill bethought himself to ask.

The black man shook his head.

"I ain't tetched a bite sence dey sol' me; dey offered it to me, but I didn't want it."

Once more the glances of the husband and wife travelled slowly back and forth, centering finally on the face of the negro.

"I reckon it's 'cause yore sick at heart," observed Gill, at first sympathetically, and then with growing firmness, as he continued, "I know how you feel; most o' yore sort has a way o' thinkin' yorese'ves a sight better'n pore white folks, an' right now the truth is you can't bear the idee o' belongin' to me 'n my wife. Now, me 'n you an' her ought to come to some sort of an agreement that we kin all live under. You won't find nuther one of us the overbearin' sort. We was forced to take you to secure ourse'ves agin' the loss of our little all, an' we want to do what's fair in every respect. I was told you was a fust-rate shoemaker. Now, ef you want to, you kin set up a shop in yore room thar an' have the last cent you kin make. You will get plenty o' work, too, fur this neighborhood is badly in need of a shoemaker. Now, my wife will fry you some fresh eggs an' bacon an' make you a good cup o' coffee."

But all that Peter Gill had managed to say with satisfaction to himself seemed to have gone into one of the negro's ears and to have met with not the slightest obstruction on its way out at the other. To the hospitable invitation which closed Peter's speech, the negro simply said:

"I don't feel like eatin' a bite."

"Oh, you don't," said Gill, at the end of his resources, "maybe you'd feel different about it ef you was to smell the bacon a-fryin'."

"I don't wan't to eat," reiterated the slave.

"Well, you needn't unless you wan't to," went on Gill, still pacifically. "That thar room on the right is fur you; jest go in it whenever you feel like it an' try to make yorese'f at home; you won't find us hard to git along with."

The Gills left their human property seated on a big rock in front of the cabin and withdrew to the rear. There they sat till near noon. Now and then Gill would peer around the corner to satisfy himself that his slave was still seated on the rock. Gill chewed nearly a week's allowance of tobacco that morning; it seemed to have a sedative effect on his nerves. Finally, Ann Duncan loomed up in the distance and strode towards the cabin. She wore a gown of less brilliant tints than the one she had worn

the day before. It had the dun color of clay washed into, rather than out of, its texture, and it hung from her narrow hips as if it were damp.

"Well, he *did* come," she remarked introductively.

Mrs. Gill nodded. "Yes; the Colonel fetched 'im over this mornin'."

"So I heerd, an' I jest 'lowed I'd step over an' see how you made out." Mrs. Duncan's rippling laugh recalled the whole of her allusions of the day previous. "Thar's more talk goin' round than you could shake a stick at, an' considerable spite an' envy. Some 'lows that the havin' o' this slave is agoin' to make you stuck up, an' that you'll move yore membership to Big Bethel meetin'-house, but law me! I can see that you are bothered. How did he take to his room?"

"He ain't so much as looked in yit," replied Mrs. Gill with a frown.

Thereupon Ann Duncan ventured up into the passage and peered cautiously round the corner at Big Joe.

"He's a-wipin' of his eyes," she announced, as she came back. "It looks like he's a-cryin' about somen'."

At this juncture, a motley cluster of men, women and children, led by Andrew Duncan, came out of the woods which fringed the red, freshly-ploughed field below, and began to steer itself, like a school of fish, towards the cabin. About fifty yards away they halted, as animals do when they scent danger. Heads up and open-mouthed, they stood gazing, first at the Gills and then at their slave. Peter Gill grew angry. He stood up and strode as far in their direction as the ashhopper under the apple-tree, and raised both his hands, as if he were frightening away a flock of crows.

"Be off, the last one of you!" he shouted, "and don't you dare show yoreselves round heer, unless you've got business. This ain't no side-show — I want you to understand that!"

They might have defied their old neighbor Gill, but the owner of a slave so big and well dressed as the human monument on the rock was too important a personage to displease with impunity; so, followed by the apologetic Mrs. Duncan, who blamed herself for having set a bad example to her curious neighbors, they slowly dispersed.

At noon Mrs. Gill went into the cabin and began to prepare dinner. She came back to her husband in a moment, and in a low voice, and one that held much significance, she said:

"I need some fire-wood." As she spoke she allowed her glance to rest on Big Joe. Gill looked at the sullen negro for half a minute, and then he shrugged his shoulders as if indecision were a burden to be shaken off, and mumbling something inaudible he went out to the wood-pile and brought in an armful of fuel.

"A pore beginning'," his wife said, as he put it down on the hearth.

"I know it," retorted Gill angrily. "You needn't begin that sort o' talk, for I won't stand it. I'm a-doin' all I can." And Gill went back to his chair.

The good housewife fried some slices of dark red ham. She boiled a pot of sweet potatoes, peeled off their jackets and made a pulp of them in a pan; into the mass she stirred sweet milk, butter, eggs, sugar and grated nutmeg. Then she rolled out a sheet of dough and cut out some open-top pies.

"I never knowed a nigger that could keep his teeth out of 'em," she chuckled.

Half an hour later she called out to Gill to come in. He paused in the doorway, staring in astonishment.

"Well, I never!" he ejaculated.

She had laid the best white cloth, got out her new knives and forks with the bone handles, and some dishes that were never used except on rare occasions. She had placed Gill's plate at the head of the table, hers at the foot and was wiping a third — the company plate with the blue decorations.

"Whar's he goin' to set an' eat?" she asked.

"Blast me ef I know any more'n a rat," Gill told her with alarmed frankness. "I hain't thought about it a bit, but it never will do fur 'im to set down with me an' you. Folks might see it, an' it would give 'em more room for fun."

Mrs. Gill laid the plate down and sighed.

"I declare I'm afeerd this nigger is agoin' to stick us up, whether or no. I won't feel much Christian humility with him at one table an' us at another, but of course I know it ain't common for folks to eat with their slaves."

Gill's glance was sweeping the table and its tempting dishes with an indescribable air of disapproval.

"You are a-fixin' up powerful," was his slow comment; "a body would think, to look at all this, that it was the fourth Sunday an' you was expectin' the preacher. You'd better begin right; we cayn't keep this up an' make a crop."

Her eyes flashed angrily.

"You had no business to bring Big Joe heer, then," she fumed. "You know well enough he's used to fine doin's, an' I'm not agoin' to have 'im make light of us, ef we are pore. I was jest athinkin'; the Whitneys always tied napkins 'round the'r necks to ketch the gravy they drap, 'an Big Joe's bound to notice that we ain't used to sech."

It was finally agreed that, for that day at least, the slave was to have his dinner served to him where he sat; so Mrs. Gill arranged it temptingly on a piece of plank, over which a piece of cloth had been spread, and took it out to him. She found him almost asleep, but he opened his eyes as she drew near.

Drowsily he surveyed the contents of the cups and dishes, his eyes kindling at the sight of the two whole custards. But his pride — it was evidently that — enabled him to manifest a sneer of irreconcilability.

"I ain't agoin' t'eat a bite," was the way he put it, stubbornly.

For a moment Mrs. Gill was nonplussed; but she believed in getting at the core of things.

"Are you a-complainin'?" she questioned.

The big negro's sneer grew more pronounced, but that was all the answer he gave.

"Don't you think you could stomach a bit o' this heer custard pie?"

Big Joe's eyes gleamed against his will, but he shook his head.

"I tol' um all ef dey sol' me to you, I wouldn't eat a bite. I'm gwine ter starve ter death."

"Oh, that's yore intention!" Mrs. Gill caught her breath. A sort of superstitious terror seized upon her as she slowly hitched back to the cabin.

"He won't tetch a bite," she informed Gill's expectant visage; "an', what's a sight more, he says he's vowed he won't eat our

victuals, an' that he's laid out to starve. Peter Gill, I'm afeerd this has been sent on us!"

"Sent on us!" echoed Gill, who also had his quota of superstition.

"Yes, it's a visitation of the Almighty fur our hoardin' up that money when so many of our neighbors is in need. I wish now we never had seed it. Ef Big Joe dies on our hands, I'll always feel like we have committed the unpardonable sin. We've talked agin' slave holdin' all our lives tell we had the bag to hold, an' now we've set up reg'lar in the business."

Gill ate his dinner on the new cloth in morose silence. A heavy air of general discontent had settled on him.

"Well," he commented, as he went to the water-sheif in the passage to take his after-dinner drink from the old cedar pail, "ef he refused 'tater custards like them thar he certainly is in a bad plight. If he persists, I'll have to send fur a doctor."

The afternoon passed slowly. The later conduct of the slave was uneventful, beyond the fact that he rose to his full height once, stretched and yawned, without looking towards the cabin, and then reclined at full length on the grass. Another batch of curious neighbors came as near the cabin as the spring. Those who had been ordered away in the forenoon had set afloat a report that Gill had said that, now he was a slave-holder, he would not submit to familiar visits from the poor white trash of the community. And Sid Ruford, the ringleader of the group at the spring, had the boldness to shout out some hints about the one-nigger, log-cabin aristocracy which drove the hot blood to Gill's tanned face. He sprang up and took down his long-barrelled "squirrel gun" from its hooks on the wall.

"I'll jest step down thar," he said, "an' see ef that gab is meant fur me."

"I wouldn't pay no 'tention to him," replied Mrs. Gill, who was held back from the brink of an explosion only by the sight of the weapon and a knowledge of Gill's marksmanship. However, Gill had scarcely taken half a dozen steps down the path when he wheeled and came back laughing.

"They run like a passle o' skeerd sheep," he chuckled as he restored his gun to its place. This incident seemed to break the bar-

rier of reserve between him and his human property, for he stood over the prostrate form of the negro and eyed him with a dissatisfied look.

"See heer," he began sullenly, "enough of a thing is a plenty. I'm gittin' sick an' tired o' this, an' I'll be dadblasted ef I'm a-goin' to let a black, poutin' scamp make me lose my natural sleep an peace o' mind. Now, you git right up off'n that damp ground an' go in yore room an' lie down, if you feel that-a-way. Folks is a-passin' along an' lookin' at you like you was a stuffed monkey."

It may have been the sight of the gun, or it may have been a masterful quality in the Anglo-Saxon voice that inspired the negro with a respect he had not hitherto had for his new owner, for he rose at once and went into his room.

At dusk Mrs. Gill waddled to the closed door of his apartment and rapped respectfully. She heard the bed creaking as if Big Joe were rising and then he cautiously opened the door and with downcast eyes waited for her to make her wishes known.

"Supper is ready," she announced in a voice which, despite her strength of character, quivered a little, "an' before settin' down to it, I thought thar would be no harm in askin' if thar's anything that would strike yore fancy. When it gits a little darker I could blind a chicken on the roost an' fry it, or I could make you some thick flour soup with sliced dumplin's."

She saw him wince as he tore himself away from the temptation she had laid before him, but he spoke quite firmly.

"I ain't a-goin' t'eat any more in this worl'," he said.

"Well, I reckon you won't in the next," said Mrs. Gill, "but I want to say that what you are contemplatin' is a sin." She turned back into the cabin and sat at the table and poured her husband's coffee in disturbed silence.

"I believe on my soul he's goin' to make a die of it," she said after awhile, as she sat munching a piece of dry bread, having no appetite at all. And Gill, deeply troubled, could make no reply.

It was their habit to go to bed as soon as supper was over, so, when they rose from the table, Mrs. Gill turned down the covers of the high-posted bed and beat the pillows. Before barring the cabin door, she scrutinized the closed shutter directly opposite, but all was still as death in the room of the slave.

For the first night in many years the old pair found they could not sleep, their brains being still active with the first great problem of their lives. The little clock struck ten. The silence of the night was disturbed by the shrilling of tree-frogs and the occasional cry of the whip-poor-will.

Suddenly Gill sprang up with a little cry of alarm. "What's that?" he asked.

"It sounded powerful like somebody a-groanin'," whispered Mrs. Gill. "Oh, Lordy, Peter, I have a awful feelin'!"

"I'll git up an' see what's ailin' 'im," said Gill, a little more calmly. "Mebby the idiot has done without food till he's took pains."

Dressing himself hastily he went outside. A pencil of yellow light was streaming through a crack beneath Big Joe's door. Gill had not put on his shoes, and his feet fell softly on the grass. Putting his ear to the door of the negro's room he overheard low groans and words which sounded like a prayer, repeated over and over in a sing-song fashion. Later he heard something like the sobbing of a big-chested man.

"Open up!" cried Gill, shaking the door, "open up, I say!"

The vocal demonstration within ceased, and there was a clatter in the vicinity of the bed, as if Big Joe were rising to his feet. The farmer repeated his firm command and the shutter slowly opened. The negro looked like a giant in the dim light of the tallow-dip on a table behind him.

"Was that you a-makin' all that noise?" asked Gill.

"I wus prayin', suh," answered Big Joe, his face in the shadow.

"Oh, that was it; I didn't know!" Gill was trying to master a most irritating awkwardness on his part; in questions of religious ceremony he always allowed for individual taste. Passing the negro, he went into the cabin and lifted the tallow-dip above his head and looked about the room suspiciously. "You was jest a-prayin', eh?"

"Yes, suh; I was a-prayin' to de Gre't Marster ter tek me off on a bed o' ease, sence I hatter go anyway. 'Er death er starvation ain't no easy job."

Gill sat down on the negro's bed. He crossed his legs and swung a bare foot to and fro in a nervous, jerky manner.

"Looky' heer," he said finally to the black profile in the doorway. "You are a plagued mystery to me. What in the name o' all possessed do you hanker after a box in the cold ground fur?"

The slave seemed slightly taken aback by the directness of this query; he left the door and sat down heavily in a chair at the fireplace. "Huh!" he grunted, "is you been all dis time en not fin' out what my trouble is?"

"Ef I *did* know I wouldn't be settin' heer at this time o' night, losin' my nat'ral sleep to ask about it," was the tart reply.

The negro grunted again. "Do you know Marse Whit's Liza?" he asked, almost eagerly.

"I believe I've seed 'er once ur twice," Gill told him. "A fine lookin' gal — about the color of a sorghum ginger-cake. Is she the one you mean?"

The big man nodded. "Me'n her was gwine ter git married, but Marse Whit' hatter trade 'er off ter Marse Stafford, en Marse Stafford is done give 'er 'er freedom yistiddy."

"Ah, he set 'er free, did he?" Gill stared and by habit awkwardly stroked that part of his face where a beard used to grow.

"Yes, suh, Marse Gill, he set 'er free, en now a free nigger is flyin' roun' her. She won't marry no slave now, suh!"

Gill drew a full breath and stood up. "Then it wasn't because you thought yorese'f so much better'n me'n my wife that you wanted to dump yoreself into eternity?"

"No, suh, dat wasn't in my min', suh."

"Well, I'm powerful glad 'o that, Joe," responded Gill, "because neither me nor my wife ever harmed a kink in yore head. Now, the gospel truth is, I was drawed into this whole business ag'in' my wishes an' me an' Lucretia would give a lots to be out of it. Now, I don't want to be the cause o' that free nigger walkin' off with yore intrusts, so heer's what I'll do. Ef you'll ride in town with me in the mornin' I'll git a lawyer to draw up as clean a set o' freedom papers as you ever laid your peepers on. What do you say?"

Big Joe's eyes expanded until they seemed all white, with dark holes in the center. For a minute he sat like a statue, as silent as the wall behind him; then he said with a deep breath: "Marse Gill, is you in earnest — my Gawd! *is* you?"

"As the Almighty is my judge, in whose presence I set at this minute."

The negro covered his face with a pair of big, quivering hands.

"Den I don't know what ter say, Marse Gill. I never expected to be a free man, en I had give up hope er ever seein' Liza ag'in. O Marse Gill, you is one er His chosen flock!"

Gill was so deeply moved that when he ventured on a reply he found difficulty in steadying his speech. His voice had a quality that was new to it. He spoke as gently as if he were speaking of recovery to a suffering child.

"Now, Joe, you crawl back in bed, an' sleep," he said, "an' in the mornin' you'll be free, as shore as the sun rises on us both."

Then he went back to bed and told his wife what he had done.

"I'm powerful glad we can git out of it so easy," she commented. "It's funny I never thought o' settin' 'im free. It looked to me like he was a-goin' to be a burden that we never could git rid of, an' now it's a-goin' to end all right in the Lord's sight."

They were just dozing off in peaceable slumber when they heard a gentle rap on the door.

"It's me, Marse Gill," came from the outside. "I'm mighty sorry to wake you ag'in, but I'm so hungry I don't think I kin wait till mornin'."

"Well, I reckon you do feel kinder empty," laughed the farmer as he sprang out of bed. He lighted a candle, and, following the spectre-like signals of his wife, who sat up in bed, he soon found the meal she had arranged for the slave at noon. "Thar," he said, as he handed it through the doorway, "I had clean forgot yore fast was over."

The next morning the farmer and Big Joe drove to town, two miles distant. Gill was gone all day and did not return till dusk. His wife went out to meet him at the wagon-shed.

"How did you make out?" she asked.

"Tip-top," he said with a laugh. "As we went to town nothin' would do the black scamp but we must go by after the gal. She happened to be dressed up, an' went to town with us. I sat in front an' driv', while they done their courtin' on the back seat. I soon got the papers in shape an' Squire Ridley spliced 'em right

on the sidewalk in front o' his office. A big crowd was thar an' you never heerd the like o' yellin'. Some o' the boys, jest fur pure devilment, picked me up an' carried me on their shoulders to the tavern an' made me set down to a hearty dinner. Joe borrowed a apron from a waiter an' insisted on waitin' on me. La me, I wisht you'd a been thar. I felt like a blamed fool."

"I reckon you did have a lots o' fun," said Mrs. Gill. "Well, I'm glad he ain't on our hands. I wouldn't pass another day like yistiddy fur all the slaves in Georgia."